

2019 Annual Report

State Rehabilitation Council

In Partnership with



**Office of
Vocational
Rehabilitation**

**Office of
Vocational
Rehabilitation
for the Blind**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES (MDRS)

WELCOME – MDRS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.....	3
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ABOUT THE STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL (SRC)

WELCOME – CHAIRMAN, STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL.....	4
SRC COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP.....	5
SRC ACTIVITIES	5-9

DESIGNATED STATE UNIT

OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (OVR)

WELCOME – DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (OVR).....	10
OVR PERFORMANCE INDICATOR DESCRIPTION.....	11
OVR HIGHLIGHTS.....	12-13

MEASURES OF SUCCESS (OVR)

OVR STATISTICS - EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES.....	14
OVR DISTRICTS SERVED – MAP.....	15

DESIGNATED STATE UNIT

OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION FOR THE BLIND (OVRB)

WELCOME – DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION FOR THE BLIND (OVRB).....	16
OVRB REGIONAL MAP.....	17
OVRB OVERVIEW.....	18
OVRB HIGHLIGHTS – REGIONS SERVED.....	19-20

MEASURES OF SUCCESS (OVRB)

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT – SERVING MISSISSIPPI.....	21
ADDIE MCBRYDE REHABILITATION CENTER FOR THE BLIND OVERVIEW AND STATISTICS	21
BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM (BEP) OVERVIEW AND STATISTICS.....	22
OVRB STATISTICS – EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES	23
OVRB SUCCESS STORY	24

MEASURES OF SUCCESS (OVR/OVRB)

CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY.....	25
SRC COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	26-30



Welcome from the Executive Director, Chris Howard

Dear Governor Bryant, Members of the Mississippi Legislature and Fellow Mississippians:

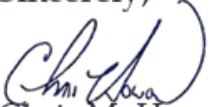
Thank you for the opportunity through this report to share a few of the many accomplishments of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVR/OVRB and the State Rehabilitation Council during Fiscal Federal Year 2019.

The partnership this agency has with each of you and the State Rehabilitation Council is vital to carrying out our mission of providing quality services to individuals with disabilities in a timely and effective manner. Thank you to each and every one of you for your service, guidance and valuable input to this agency's work to assist Mississippians with disabilities to become successfully employed.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2019, the MDRS Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind served **17,126** job seekers with disabilities while at the same time achieving outstanding ratings in client satisfaction surveys. We successfully helped **2,894** individuals with disabilities enter the workforce and become successfully employed, leading them to greater economic self-sufficiency. Through the dedicated work of this agency, we have made many great accomplishments this past year; including but not limited to: Partnered with a large company in our state to develop a customized training program for individuals with disabilities that has resulted in over 100 career opportunities, The expansion of the Project SEARCH program across our state, Increased partnerships with school districts in an effort to reach young adults with disabilities and prepare them for careers after graduation and also, Held job fairs specifically designed for individuals with disabilities to provide an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to meet face to face with prospective employers.

The key to any success we experience as an agency is to be credited to our outstanding staff at MDRS who consult with the members of the State Rehabilitation Council and the consumers we serve.

We look forward to this continued partnership and another year of successful outcomes.

Sincerely,

Chris M. Howard
Executive Director

MISSISSIPPI

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL CHAIR LETTER



Dear Governor Bryant and Members of the Mississippi Legislature:

On behalf of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), I am happy to share the annual report of the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVR/OVRB).

The State Rehabilitation Council is a body mandated by The Rehabilitation Act and its resulting regulations at CFR 361.16. Members, described in these regulations, represent a broad range of individuals with disabilities across the state.

Our mandated functions include:

- Reviewing, analyzing, and advising OVR/OVRB on the performance of their responsibilities related to eligibility and order of selection; the extent, scope, and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services; and functions that affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving employment outcomes
- Partnering with OVR/OVRB in developing goals and priorities; and evaluating the effectiveness in obtaining these goals
- Advising OVR/OVRB in the vocational rehabilitation portion of the Unified State Plan
- Conducting a review and analysis of consumer satisfaction
- Submitting this report and making it available to the public
- Coordinating activities with other named Councils within the state, to include the Statewide Independent Living Council
- Performing other relevant functions the SRC determines appropriate consistent with the purpose of OVR/OVRB

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' OVR/ OVRB have continued effective Vocational Rehabilitation Services and attempted new initiatives with success this year that have brought real change to the lives of Mississippians who experience disability. Employment can bring about great change in an individual's life and without support from OVR and OVRB, these state citizens would have not achieved these changes that quite certainly made life better.

The State Rehabilitation Council is happy to continue to advise the agency in regards to the individual stakeholder groups who we represent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mary Lundy Meruvia'.

Mary Lundy Meruvia, Chairperson
State Rehabilitation Council

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

SRC Council Membership: July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2021

Mary Lundy Meruvia, Chairperson
Chris Howard, Ex. Officio

Presley Posey

Pam Dollar

Augusta Smith

Ed Roberson

Donald Brown

Rebecca Treadway

Josh Bower

Lee Cole

Jin Joo Crosby

Shannon Hillman

Cassandra Singleton

Donna Foster

John McGinn

Brad Bounds

Jean Walley

The Public is always invited to attend the quarterly State Rehabilitation Council Meetings. Meeting locations, dates and times and are posted at www.mdrs.ms.gov and the NFB Newslines. If you would like to attend a meeting, contact Betsy Simoneaux at bsimoneaux@mdrs.ms.gov or call at 601-853-5336 for further information.

2019 MISSISSIPPI STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) held four quarterly meetings to give guidance and review of the implementation of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) state goals and priorities. The SRC assisted in developing and making recommendations for both programs. The Council met in December of 2018, March 2019, and June 2019 at the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation main office in Madison, MS. The September meeting was held in Tupelo, MS in conjunction with the Rehabilitation Association of Mississippi (RAM) Annual Conference.

The Council reviewed and provided input at each meeting related to the State Goals and Priorities in FFY 2019. The topics covered were:

December 2018 Meeting:

Transition Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) – WIOA requires that OVR/OVRB make Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) available to all students with a disability ages 14-21. Per the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) there are over 20,000 students in public schools that are identified as such and are being served under IEP's (Individualized Education Plans) or 504 Plans.

In FY 2019, there were 617 Potentially Eligible (PE) students and 3,181 OVR Eligible students. Acquiring new contracts with school districts and renewing current contacts with Transition Assistants will assist in increasing referrals.

Seven proposals have been executed throughout the state. Once schools have been introduced to and trained for Potentially Eligible referrals, the numbers should increase dramatically.

The Peer Mentoring Program Pilot began at USM and MSU providers this past fall. The program is for VR eligible college students who may be struggling and need help to determine what their may need in order for them to be successful and graduate. We have received positive feedback on this Pilot Program.

March 2019 Meeting:

Mississippi Able Program - In June 2019, The ABLE Account became available to individuals with disabilities. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act was added to Section 529A of the Federal Tax Code in December 2014. In April of 2018, the Mississippi Legislature passed SB 2311 establishing Mississippi's ABLE Act.

ABLE Accounts are tax-advantaged savings accounts for individuals with disabilities. Income earned in the account is not taxed if spent on qualified disability-related expenses. Eligibility is limited to those individuals with a diagnosed disability before 26 years of age. If Age and SSI/SSDI criteria are met, you are automatically eligible to establish an ABLE Account. The max yearly limit for contributions is \$100,000 to keep SSI Benefits.

More information and pamphlets will be available closer to June 2019. A draft handout was provided to the Council Members. MDRS is one of several agencies to be appointed to lead this effort with Pam Dollar, SRC Council Member sitting on the ABLE Board. Ms. Dollar thanked MDRS for all the support given especially working with no budget. She stated that Mississippi is fortunate that the ABLE Act does go through MDRS.

Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice (M-PIC) - Nancy Beal, WIPA Coordinator spoke for Lynda Hall. MPIC provides Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) services funded by the SSA under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement ACT of 1999. The purpose of M-PIC/WIPA is to enable all SSA beneficiaries with disabilities to make informed choices about work. WIPA is 100% Federally Funded by SSA.

The WIPA Grant was reauthorized to MDRS in August 2015. This free service is available to SSI/SSDI recipients aged 14 to 64 who want to work. Eight specially trained CWICS (Community Work Incentive Coordinators) work with individuals throughout the state to make sure they understand complex employment and benefit-related issues.

CWICs provide information to the general public and assist them in understanding how they can work and how it affects their benefits. The message is "that it is possible to work, keep benefits and can reapply for benefits if the work status changes". "WIPA is not intended to force benefits, but to show work is always better option."

June 2019 Meeting:

Transition Policy - updates have been sent for review and approval. The Transition program sets up OVR/OVRB to partner with education and workforce programs to facilitate vocational rehabilitation services to meet the needs of students/youth with disabilities. This program assists with the transition process from school to post-secondary education and/or to competitive integrated employment. Potentially eligible students; Services Coordinators;

Pre-ETS, Required Services, Authorized Services and Reasonable Accommodations are some of the areas that are addressed in order to be within the federal guidelines. Coordination with schools and other entities are also included in this policy. A list of 2019-2020 Request for Proposals (RFP)/Pre-Employment Transitions Services (Pre-ETS) Providers were provided.

Alcohol and Drug Program - developed a new Referral Source Denial Letter. The Referral Source Denial letter is provided to our treatment facilities for their documentation so they are aware of a denied referral for VR services and the reason.

Reasons a referral would be denied for our VR services include:

- was not able to successfully complete a primary treatment program
- refused to return to or pursue competitive integrated employment
- no written statement indicating the referral is eligible for adjudication of felony charges
- refused to attend secondary treatment and/or participate in the VR program.

September 2019 Meeting:

- Pre-ETS – OVR/OVRB has secured over 20 Request for Proposal (RFP) providers to cover the state with pre- ETS.
- Pre-Employment Transition – potentially eligible and eligible clients can be provided services beginning at age 14.
- Financial Needs Analysis (FNA) - New Policy regarding financial participation has been submitted for approval. Services that will require a FNA are: Academic College Training; all computers and software purchased for basic education and college training; hearing aids; home modifications; vehicle modifications, services to Family Members; and/or Post-employment services in the (7) aforementioned services areas.
- Order of Selection (OOS) Policy – OOS policy states that if at any time VR resources are not sufficient to serve all eligible clients, an OOS shall be implemented. OOS established a system of criteria for prioritizing individuals with the most significant disabilities giving them priority to receive services.

- Some of the changes made within OOS are:
 1. MDRS will elect to provide services, regardless of any established OOS to eligible individuals who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment;
 2. Students with disabilities are not exempt from any of the OOS requirements. A student with a disability who requires Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and any additional VR services must apply and be determined eligible for VR Services have an IPE.

SRC Recommendations on VR Program State Goals and Priorities For 2019

The SRC will continue to be advised on a quarterly basis about the status of Order of Selection in making sure all eligible clients are able to receive services in a timely manner.

SRC Committees:

1. Policy Committee - In July of 2017, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) formed a committee to review standing bylaws to ensure they were compliant with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Final Rules issued by the United States Departments of Labor and Education. The committee found no significant changes that impacted the function of the SRC. However, other changes were recommended by the committee that included:

- acronyms were clarified;
- language / terms were updated to reflect WIOA language;
- references to laws were updated;
- sections were combined to avoid duplication;
- sections were simplified for clarity; and
- standing committees within the SRC were eliminated giving the Chair the authority to establish ad-hoc committees when needed.

The agency attorney for the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services reviewed the recommended changes to ensure they met all applicable State and Federal laws. The draft bylaws were then opened for comment to all SRC members. At the end of the comment period, the committee reconvened and discussed all comments making changes as necessary and appropriate.

The final draft of the bylaws was presented to the SRC in March 2018 during the quarterly meeting at which time they were approved by unanimous vote.

2. Website Committee – This committee was organized to redesign the section on the State Rehabilitation Council. The only information currently on the website about the SRC is a list of the council members and the SRC nomination form. The current SRC information is hard to find under the MDRS website. The current site does not provide information about the SRC or their functions. If committee members have difficulty locating it, it will be even harder for consumers to find it. To find current SRC information go the MDRS

website > About MDRS > Advisory Councils > SRC. The Committee is proposing the changes at the December 2019 meeting.

3. Questionnaire Revision Committee – committee will meet in the Spring 2020.

The SRC is a valuable partner with OVR/OVRB in the development and implementation of the OVR/OVRB Consumer Satisfaction Survey. Chair Mary Murveria appreciates the work of the OVR /OVRB Staff in the reviewing the results of the annual survey and making appropriate changes where needed. The Council recommended to share the results of the survey with OVR/OVRB staff to show appreciation of services and also to explore trends for improvement as needed.



LaVonda Hart
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation



In 2019, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) managed over 12,800 consumer cases during the federal program year. The goal of services is competitive integrated employment, which is employment in jobs with work settings, wages, benefits and advancement opportunities equivalent to jobs held by individuals without disabilities.

OVR continued to implement and provide extensive training to staff to provide, collect and document new information as required by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

OVR training is a continuous process and we will continue to ensure that OVR staff, specifically VR Counselors who provide direct services, possess a 21st century knowledge of the labor market. Therefore, quality competitive employment outcomes will be achieved by the consumers we serve.

In, 2018, OVR Counselors were placed on new performance development appraisals designed to ensure consumer are moving through the OVR process to education and employment opportunities. Our consumer's continue on the path in which they are provided quality services that direct them to developing skills and credentials so that they will be able to compete for employment opportunities in today's competitive labor market. Extensive focus has been on outreach activities to ensure individuals with disabilities in the state are aware of where and how to apply for services offered by OVR. We will continue to create awareness of the OVR program. With continued outreach in our communities, we will assist individuals with disabilities in attaining their career goals thereby increasing their ability to live a self-sufficient life.

With increased focus on students with disabilities, OVR Counselors continue to work with and establish relationships with schools throughout the state. OVR has increased the focus on students with disabilities to concur with the WIOA requirements. OVR Counselors are continuing to establish relationships with schools throughout the state. School personnel are assisted in understanding the nature and scope of the Pre-Employment Transition Services, and how these services are designed to assist Mississippi students with disabilities to understand careers, make career decisions, and explore opportunities. After the provisions of these services, students are then ready to make an informed decision regarding post-secondary training and employment opportunities.

We are pleased to have the Mississippi State Rehabilitation Council as an important partner in the success of the OVR program and the consumers we serve. We appreciate the continued support of our MDRS Executive Director as we continue our mission to provide vocational rehabilitation services. We look forward to the continued partnership and support as we provide Mississippi job seekers with disabilities with the highest quality employment and training services.

LaVonda C. Hart, MS, CRC
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

2019 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The OVR Program was able to provide services to over **12,800** Mississippians with disabilities to receive training and skills for meaningful employment, during the past year. **2,542** Mississippians with disabilities became employed after receiving OVR services.

OVR services are provided through the federal grant (78.7 percent) through Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), our federal partner, which is state matched with appropriation (21.3 percent) from the Mississippi Legislature. Without these funds, the over 12,800 Mississippians with disabilities who were in need of services would not have been served.

Under section 116(b)(2)(A) of WIOA there are six Primary Indicators of Performance. For Program Year 2019 they are:

- **Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit:** The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program (for title I Youth, the indicator is the percentage of participants in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit);
- **Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit:** The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program (for title I Youth, the indicator is the percentage of participants in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit);
- **Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit:** The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
- **Credential Attainment:** The percentage of those participants enrolled in an education or training program (excluding those in on-the-job training (OJT) and customized training) who attain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma, or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the program;
- **Measurable Skill Gains:** The percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains, defined as documented academic, technical, occupational, or other forms of progress, towards such a credential or employment.
- **Effectiveness in Serving Employers:** WIOA sec. 116(b)(2)(A)(i)(VI) requires the Departments to establish a primary indicator of performance for effectiveness in serving employers. The Departments are piloting three approaches designed to gauge three critical workforce needs of the business community.

OVR will continue to submit quarterly 911 data in order to establish baseline information for our common performance measures. OVR has started to receive data on the WIOA new performance indicators above. The data is obtained from the RSA dashboard.

Office Of Vocational Rehabilitation

HIGHLIGHTS

MISSISSIPPIANS SERVED IN FFY 2018

- **15,383 individuals** with disabilities were referred to and/or applied for and received **VR Pre-ETS, VR Career Services and/or VR Training Services**.
- **2,542 individuals** with disabilities successfully **reached their job goal** and entered the workforce.
- **4,782 individuals** with disabilities developed a new **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)** designed to reach a competitive employment outcome.
- **2,764 individuals** who are **Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind or Late Deafened** received services resulting in **1,050** being **successfully employed**.
- **500 plus hours** of interpreting service were provided by the **Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing**.
- **482 Mississippians** were served by **Supported Employment Program** resulting in **62** gaining meaningful employment.
- **1,766 clients** received **Assessments** and/or **Work Adjustment Services**.
- **15** Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) known as **AbilityWorks** are operated by MDRS. **1,755** Mississippians were served by **AbilityWorks**, which is a statewide training system.
- **1,260** Mississippians received **Section 511- Career Counseling Information and Referral (CCIR)**

Serving Mississippi Students and Youth - Pre-Employment Transition Services:

- Students with disabilities, ages 14-21, receive the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) listed below as needed to help prepare for post-secondary education such as college, vocational schools, etc.
- Counseling on opportunities for post-secondary education such as college, vocational schools,
- Work based learning experiences, including internships and On-the-Job Training.
- Training in self-advocacy and social skills.

In 2019 (OVR/OVRB) provided:

- **2,525** potentially eligible students (VR/VRB) with disabilities ages 14-21 were provided **Pre-Employment Transition services (Pre-ETS)**.
- **3,178** students/youth with disabilities were provided career and training services.
- **165** students with disabilities obtained competitive integrated employment upon transitioning from high school.

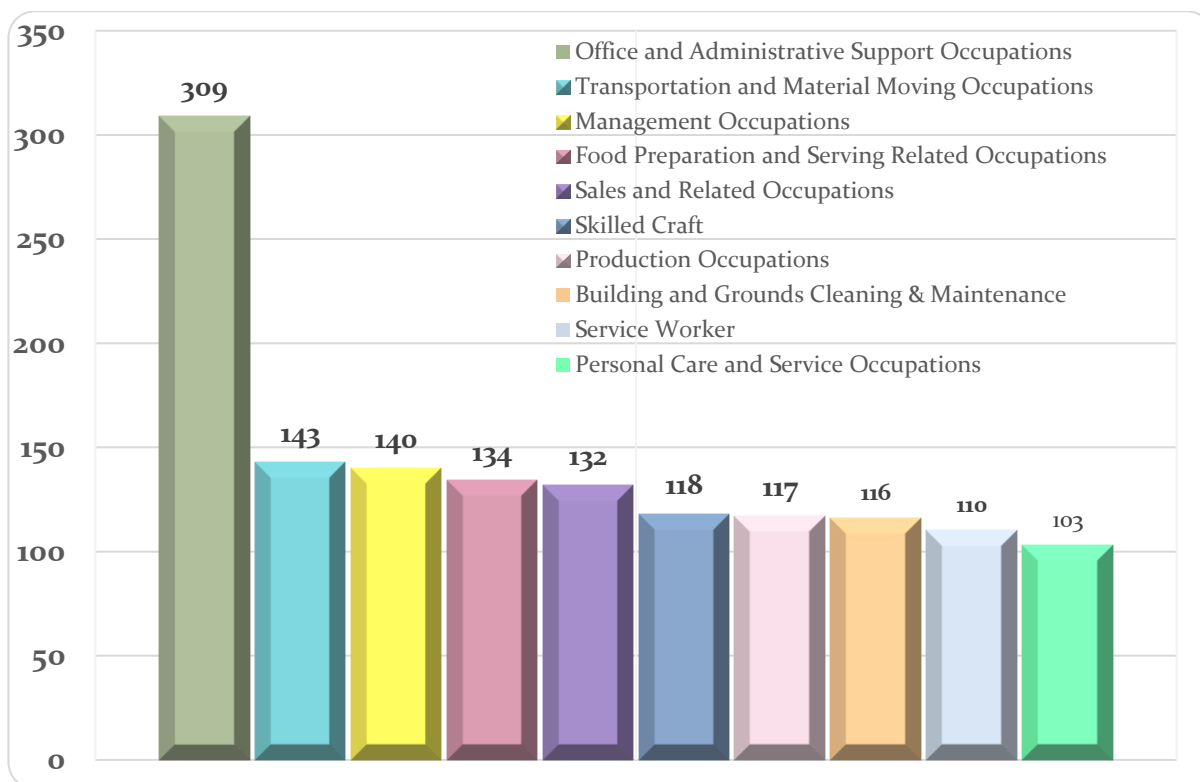
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES – VR CONSUMERS

TOP 10 OCCUPATIONS – INTEGRATED SETTING 2019

Below is a chart showing the Top 10 Occupations of VR Consumers and the number of clients that were employed in these occupations.

OCCUPATION	NUMBER OF CLIENTS
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	309
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	143
Management Occupations	140
Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations	134
Sales and Related Occupations	132
Skilled Craft	118
Production Occupations	117
Building and Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	116
Service Worker	110
Personal Care and Service Occupations	103



Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

DISTRICTS SERVED

District I

Kenisha Black, District Manager

(Calhoun, Coahoma, Desoto, Lafayette, Marshall, Panola, Tate, Tunica, Quitman, Yalobusha)

51 County Road 166

Oxford, MS 38655

(662) 234-3171

District II

Keely Green, District Manager

(Alcorn, Benton, Itawamba, Lee, Pontotoc, Prentiss, Tippah, Tishomingo, Union)

2620 Traceland Drive

Tupelo, MS 38801

(662) 842-1010

District III

Gaylin Matthews, District Manager

(Bolivar, Carroll, Grenada, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Washington, Yazoo)

104 Professional Plaza

Greenwood, MS 38930

(662) 453-6172

District IV

Shondra Gathings, District Manager

(Clay, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Lowndes, Monroe, Montgomery, Oktibbeha, Webster)

207 Industrial Park Road

Starkville, MS 39759

(662) 323-9594

District V

Janet Darden, District Manager

(Hinds, Warren)

3895 Beasley Road

Jackson, MS 39213

(601) 898-7004

District VI

Mary Habig, District Manager

(Attala, Leake, Madison, Rankin, Scott, Simpson, Smith)

1032 Center Pointe Blvd.

Pearl, MS 39208

(601) 706-5600

District VII

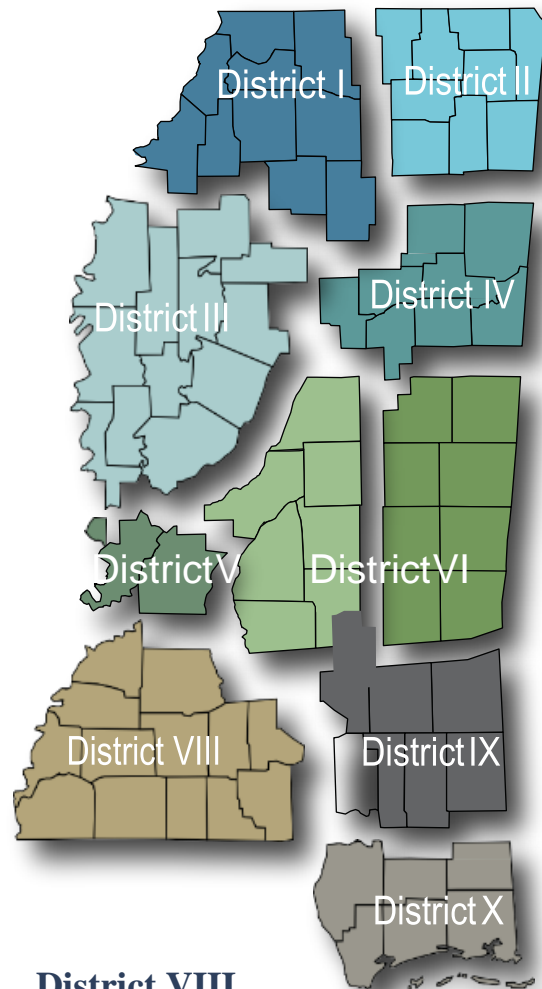
Sandra Sanders, District Manager

(Clarke, Jasper, Kemper, Lauderdale, Neshoba, Newton, Noxubee, Winston)

1003 College Drive

Meridian, MS 39304

(601) 483-3881



District VIII

Jeanette Yates, District Manager

(Adams, Amite, Claiborne, Copiah, Franklin, Jefferson, Jefferson Davis, Lincoln, Lawrence, Marion, Pike, Walthall, Wilkinson)

1221 Parklane Road, NE

McComb, MS 39648

(601) 249-2498

District IX

Jean Walley, District Manager

(Covington, Forrest, Greene, Jones, Lamar, Perry, Wayne)

17 J.M. Tatum Industrial Drive, Suite 130

Hattiesburg, MS 39401

(601) 545-5619

District X

Kathy Woodard, District Manager

(George, Hancock, Harrison, Jackson, Pearl River, Stone)

13486 Fastway Lane

Gulfport, MS 39503

(228) 575-3789

Dorothy Young
Director, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the
Blind



What a wonderful year the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVRB) has experienced. We could not do this work alone. We, meaning, vocational rehabilitation counselors for the blind, instructors for the blind, itinerate teachers, administrative assistants, volunteers, and clients; we, as well as, some wonderful Mississippians helped find meaningful employment for over 300 Mississippians who are blind and or visually impaired. Our achievement should make Mississippi taxpayers proud.

Before we share our SRC Annual Report, we would like to thank our Executive Director Mr. Chris Howard and the State Rehabilitation Council for their leadership, guidance, and support in making sure every eligible person who in need of our services received them in a quality and timely manner.

The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) addresses the functional limitations for over 1,000 Mississippians who are limited in one or more functional capacities such as mobility, communication, self-care- self direction, work tolerance, or work skills in terms of an employment outcome through MDRS Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind. Although it can appear to be a small program, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind has a big presence in Mississippi. *Employment for our service group is life changing.*

OVRB is committed to providing quality services to assist Mississippi's citizens who are blind, deafblind, or visual impaired in achieving their maximum level of employment, education, and personal independence through our employees who are employed throughout our state. This report will highlight improvements and change for every Mississippian who received services from the employees in OVRB. The report will have an update/highlight from the following areas:

- Northern Region
- Southern Region
- Business Enterprise Program (BEP)
- Addie McBryde Center for the Blind
- Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice (M-PIC)

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dorothy L. Young". The signature is fluid and cursive.

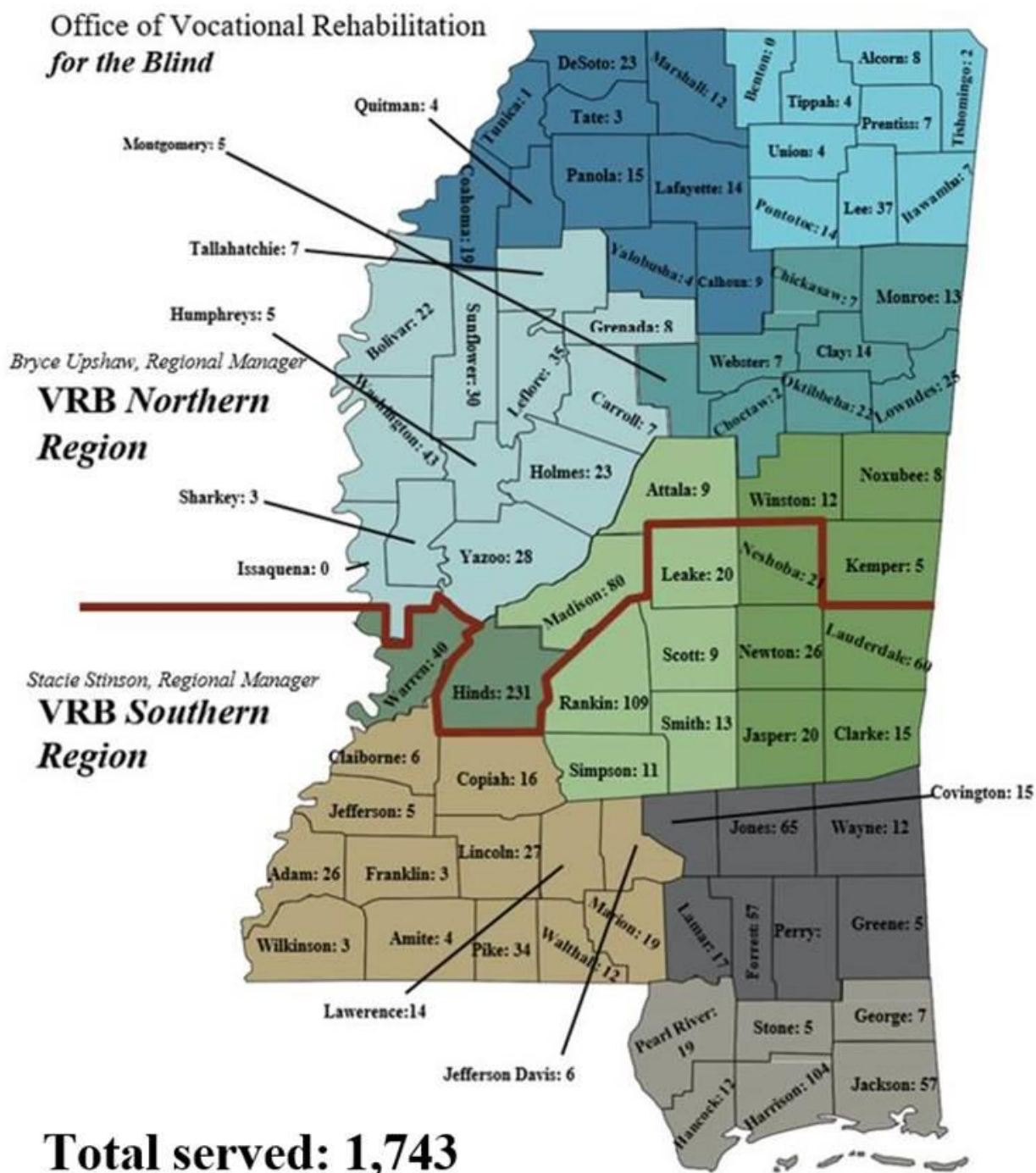
Dorothy L. Young, M.S., C.V.S.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, Director

The **leading causes of blindness** and low vision in the United States are primarily age-related eye diseases such as age-related macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

REGIONAL MAP



Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

OVERVIEW

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind is divided into two regions located in the North and the South. Each region is staffed with qualified professionals who provide vocational rehabilitation counseling, education, independent living skills orientation and mobility training, low vision rehabilitation technology and Deaf-Blind Services for eligible Mississippians. Each client works with their own OVRB counselor to develop their own Individualized Plan of Services (IPE) that matches their strengths, abilities and capabilities for a successful employment outcome.

In preparation for the 2019 SRC Annual Report, the Regional Office Managers summarized key programs, activities and accomplishments in addressing employment and independence. Below are some of the Northern and Southern Region key program highlights from October 1, 2018-September 30, 2019.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

HIGHLIGHTS – REGIONS SERVED

SOUTHERN REGION

OVRB Southern Regional Office Workforce Summary:

- **426** New Applications
- **304** New employment plans developed
- **172** Closed successfully in competitive integrated employment
- **872** Total served in the Southern Region

OVRB Southern Highlights:

- **9** individuals who are blind and or visual impairments participated in OVRB 6th Summer Internship Program.
- **172** Blind or visual impaired Mississippians successfully rehabilitated in competitive integrated employment
- **10** of Mississippi Southern Regional High School Seniors enrolled in college from 2018
- **8** Students who received Pre-ETS went into training programs
- **8** Students participated in the Mississippi 2nd National Federation of the blind (NFB) and OVRB Career Mentoring Program. The goal is to match students who are blind and between the ages of **14-21** with successful, committed, and caring Blind mentors.
- **32** total students attended college training
- **9** counselor participated in **99** outreach activities

***Describe two of your region's greatest accomplishments for this year.
Why were they outstanding?***

- The number of application and IPEs increased. Counselors increased the outreach activities. Counselors were encouraged to attend community event/activities in order to discuss and distribute agency information.
- VRB/ILB counselors together participated in Low Vision Clinics. The collaboration helped ILB/VRB counselors to reach out and educate communities about services offered through VRB/ILB programs.

***What innovative activities or practices did you try that had a positive impact on staff or clients?
Anything else you would like to share?***

- Staff has been encouraged to think outside the norm in order to increase applications. Besides visiting doctors and their staff to discuss VRB services, counselors also attended job fairs, transition fairs/meetings, met with transitional coordinators, met with church ministerial staff, placed flyers in gyms, grocery stores and pharmacies.

NORTHERN REGION

OVRB Northern Regional Office Workforce Summary:

- **355** New Applications
- **287** New employment plans developed
- **180** Closed successfully in competitive integrated employment
- **871** Total served in the Northern Region

OVRB Northern Highlights:

- **19** students were provided with Pre-ETS services.
- **2** graduated high school and both entered college or a training program
- **6** of these students participated in the NFB Peer Mentoring program
- **5** students participated in the MDRS Summer Internship Program (ages 19-23)
- **23** clients received post-secondary training services (adult and youth)
- **138** Outreach activities completed by VRB North to various community partners.

What innovative activities or practices did you try that had a positive impact on staff or clients? Anything else you would like to share?

Over the last two years, the Greenville OVRB office has seen a sizeable increase in new clients. The counselor in that office, Keena Morris and her assistant, Karen Higdon, attribute this increase to Keena's grass roots advertising efforts. Keena started with MDRS in February 2016 and has seen a 40% growth in the number of new applications for VRB services since October 2016. She has taken brochures and business cards to businesses such as gyms, churches and other places that have typically not been targeted as potential markets for VR clients. She has also made appointments with HR departments of businesses to promote VR services for employees of those companies. The increase in new cases has been so successful that her tactics have been implemented in another VRB office and has shown early signs of success. The VRB office in Tupelo began using some of Keena's ideas and has seen a 50% increase in new applications in the last several months compared to similar time frames in previous years. The increase in Greenville area has also helped to increase applications in the neighboring Greenwood office where they have seen a 25% increase in new cases since October 2018 compared to the previous year. This is attributed to family and friends spreading the word about VR Services in the Delta Counties.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT - *SERVING MISSISSIPPI*

OVRB Workforce Development by Numbers

Serving Mississippi Blind and Visually Impaired Job Seekers

- **1,743** Mississippians who are Blind and Visually Impaired were served
- **781** new applications submitted
- **590** individuals who are Blind and Visually Impaired started a new Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) designed to reach a competitive employment outcome for the first time.
- **352** individuals who are Blind, Visually Impaired, and Deaf-Blind reached their career goal and entered the Mississippi Workforce.

Addie McBryde Center for the Blind

Highlights for

BLINDNESS AND PERSONAL TRAINING FOR CAREER AND COLLEGE SERVICES

- **106 blind and visually impaired clients** were provided career and college services by the Addie McBryde Center (Blindness Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) operated by MDRS, which is a statewide blindness personnel adjustment training system.
- **30 blind and visually impaired clients** received braille training
- **35 blind and visually impaired clients** received training
- **10 blind and visually impaired clients** received Mobile Technology training
- **22 Students** participated in Addie Summer Program

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

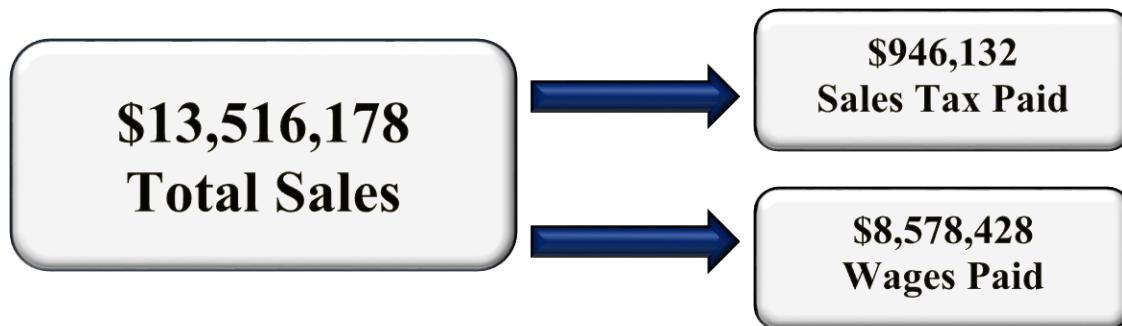
THE BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM (BEP)

The **Business Enterprise Program (BEP)** provides support for self-employment opportunities in the food service industry for Mississippians who are legally Blind. These BEP entrepreneurs operate a variety of businesses including vending machine routes, snack bars, and military base cafeterias.

In 2019, **38 Blind Entrepreneurs** operated successful businesses as BEP vendors:

- ❖ **318 individuals** employed supported by BEP operators
- ❖ **133 sites** in 33 cities across the state
- ❖ **2 BEP** students graduated and became a licensed BEP operator

Contributed More than \$1 Million to Mississippi Economy



Business Enterprise Program Introduces...



Clevon Biggs, BEP Vendor/ Manager of the MDHS Micro Market, was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa since birth. Clevon knew by having this disease he would be faced with challenges. Clevon was determined eligible through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind and provided services under and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). He was willing to relocate to Jackson, MS from Hattiesburg MS, to receive training and pursue his dreams of becoming an entrepreneur and a successful businessman. These services lead to Clevon obtaining his career goal as Self Employed, Business Owner under the MDRS Business Enterprise Program.

Clevon currently manages two businesses at the Mississippi Department of Human Services - micro markets located on 750 North State Street and 200 Lamar Street in Jackson, MS with the help of his brother Robert Biggs. With the help of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind- He is now a Mississippi business owner and taxpayer.

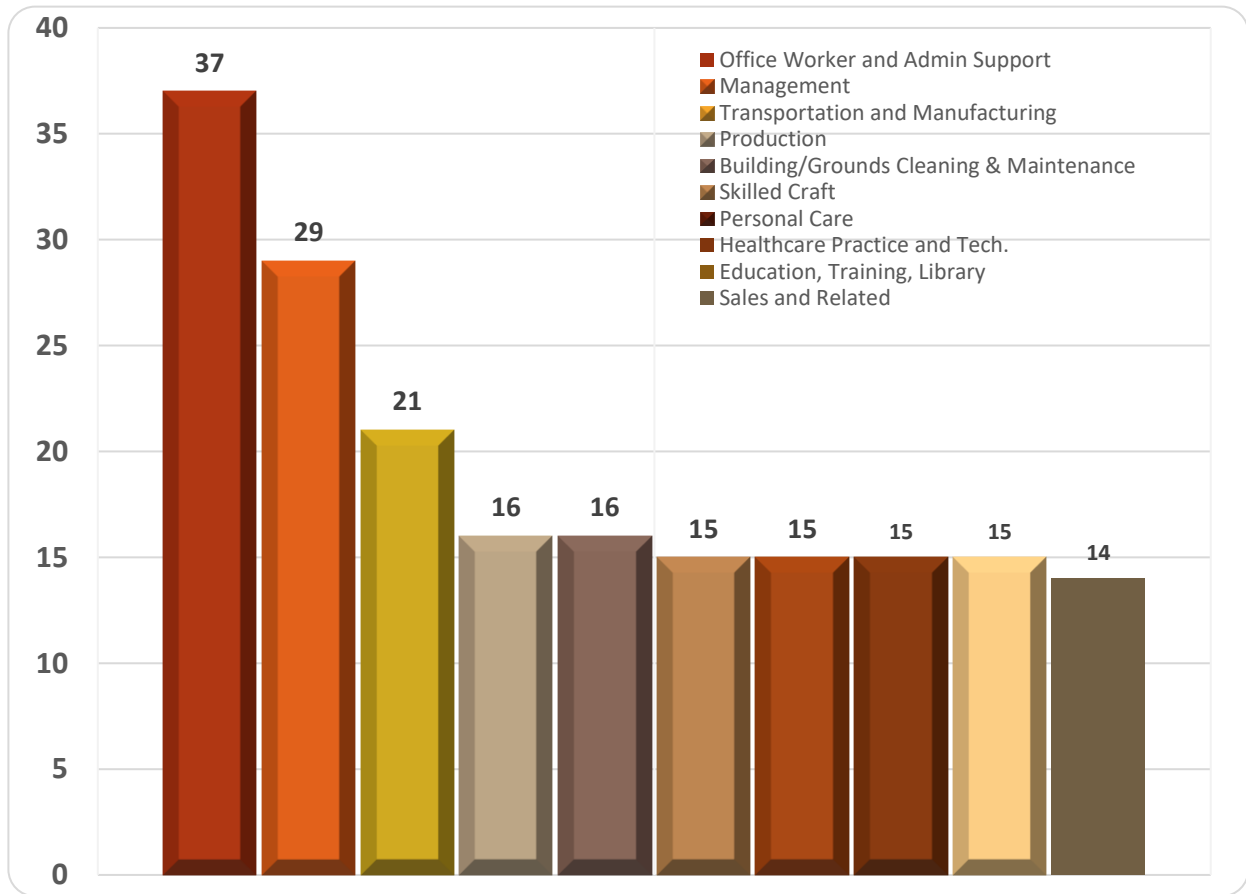
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES – VRB CONSUMERS

TOP 10 OCCUPATIONS – INTEGRATED SETTING (2019)

The Job Table below shows the ‘Top 10 Occupations’ obtained by the OVRB Consumers who successfully achieved their employment goal in **Federal Fiscal Year 2019**.

OCCUPATION	NUMBER OF CLIENTS
Office and Administrative Support Occupations	37
Management Occupations	29
Transportation and Material Moving Occupations	21
Production Occupations	16
Building/Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	16
Skilled Craft	15
Personal Care and Service Occupations	15
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations	15
Education, Training and Library Occupations	15
Sales and Related Occupations	14



Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind

“Dreams Do Come True”

SUCCESS STORY



Kenneth Hudson, MRC, CRC
OVRB Counselor

I was born with Glaucoma and had Glaucoma surgery on both eyes when I was 6 months old. I was very nearsighted from birth, but with prescription spectacles, I was able to see well enough to acquire a driver's license at the age of fifteen and to acquire a High School Diploma in May of 1974. A couple of years after my high school graduation I obtained employment with a tree service where I learned how to trim trees. I lost vision with my right eye due to glaucoma when I was in my early thirties. My vision with my left eye was well enough to continue working as a tree trimmer. In my early forties, the vision with my left eye had deteriorated causing my ability to perform the tasks of a tree trimmer to be hazardous. My employment as a tree trimmer was ended.

Wanting to obtain employment in a different occupation, I became a client of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind. I was unsure about another occupation that I would be interested in pursuing. I attended training at The Addie McBryde Rehabilitation Center for the Blind to learn independent living skills to help me adjust and adapt to my visual impairment. After observing the assistance the counselors of The Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services provided to their clients and observing the assistance that the staff of The Addie McBryde Center provided to people who were either visually impaired or blind, I became interested in pursuing a career as a rehabilitation counselor. Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind provided services to me enabling me to return to college where I obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. I became totally blind during the final year of my undergraduate studies. With services provided to me by Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, I was able to continue my education and acquire a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling from Mississippi State University in December of 2014. During The final semester of my graduate program, I completed an internship with The Hinds County Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind, and in October of 2015, I was hired as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in the Hinds County office where I have been employed for four years and two months planning and providing services to people who are visually impaired or blind assisting them with either obtaining employment or maintaining their employment.

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEY

Annual FY 2019 Results for the Closed Ended Questions

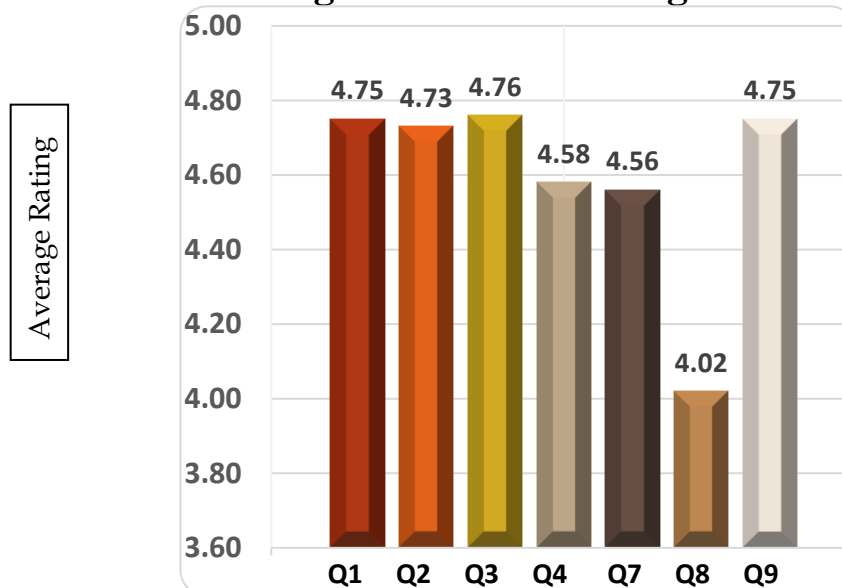
The ratings for the various services consumers received are presented below using the average (mean) score given to each item by all respondents interviewed. If an item did not apply to a particular respondent or if the consumer did not know or refused to rate an item the consumer's response is not included in calculating the average score for that item. The seven items rated are in Table 1 (for verbiage, reference questionnaire.) Chart 1 is included for an easy visual comparison. The respondents were asked to rate the items (Questions Q1 to Q4 and questions Q7 to Q9) on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being very good. Thus, a high score indicates that the service was good and a low score that it was poor.

Table 1 - Service ratings by consumer

Rate the following items on a scale of '1 to 5', with '1' being poor and '5' being very good.

	# of Consumers	Average Rating Mean
Q1 The help the OVR staff provided at the time you applied for VR services	1,007	4.75
Q2 The help from the OVR staff during the planning of your services	1,006	4.73
Q3 The help from the OVR staff when you were receiving your VR Services	1,000	4.76
Q4 The help you received from other agencies or service providers	138	4.58
Q7 Your employment outcome	820	4.56
Q8 Employment benefits provided by your new employer	409	4.02
Q9 Overall, how do you rate the services you received?	1,003	4.75

Chart 1 - Average Consumer Ratings Annual FY 2019



SRC 2018-2019

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are the SRC Questions that are on the quarterly questionnaires with SRC Comments and the DSU responses.

1. Do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services' Office of Vocational Rehabilitation or Vocational Rehabilitation for the Blind (OVR/OVRB) service delivery system?

SRC Comments:

- *Please make sure you use person first language. Also, please call back or make contact back with client or client applicant in a timely manner.*
- *No*
- *Keep up the great work!*
- *To educate clients on ABLÉ Act.*
- *None*
- *I think it would be helpful for these reports to be first in the meeting. By the time were listening to them, everyone needed a break. Or build a break into the meeting. The Annual Report was very nicely done. That was clearly a huge job-well done!*
- *Great Report.*
- *Recommendations: counselors provide information on application process/services provided to individuals. Some potential clients may slip through the cracks due to lack of communication between the clients and provider. Some clients are frustrated when follow-up calls/services takes a long time, or non-existent. Another recommendation is to provide counselors with additional training on new code changes or rule changes. This may include the type of services clients are eligible for that includes job training. Hire additional staff to assist with the number of clients counselors are assigned (host a job fair).*
- *The numbers served are impressive. The open case satisfaction survey from certain districts did not indicate as high of satisfaction while services were being provided.*
- *None.*
- *No. Keep up the great work.*
- *The number of individuals served by VR and VRB that was presented during this quarter's SRC was impressive. Likewise, the performance data regarding timeliness of eligibility determinations and IPE development was equally impressive. Magnificent job. Employment outcome data presented quarterly would be helpful to understand the end impact to individuals' lives after services.*
- *No comments.*
- *None.*

DSU Response:

The VR and VRB Director will continue to provide the SRC with updates regarding the numbers served and overall performance data. We will continue to implement strategies to promote good customer service and promote outreach in the community regarding VR Services. The consumer satisfactions surveys will continue to be provided as a means of providing the DSU with feedback regarding the quality of client services.

2. **Having heard this quarter's report on the results of consumer satisfaction surveys, do you have any comments or recommendations for input into the service delivery process?**

SRC Comments:

- *From what I heard from the report the survey results sounded like MDRS was doing a great job.*
- *No*
- *Keep up the good work.*
- *The ratings are excellent. Keep up the great work.*
- *No comments.*
- *Keep up the great work.*
- *I believe MSU does a very nice job calling for the input information*
- *I wish the consumer satisfaction measures of open and closed cases could be congruent in both questions asked and scale used so that the two could be compared. The reports indicate overall satisfaction. The staff described use of the data to provide feedback to staff that leads to continual improvement.*
- *Develop a process that can be easily followed by internal administrators and staff and 3rd party entities. Provide customer service training for all staff members and administrators.*
- *Individuals whose cases are closed continue to have high satisfaction this quarter. That fact speaks a lot for the outcomes of services for peoples' lives. I struggle making a comparison due to the two different scales used for open and closed cases. I would like to see the same 1 to 5 scale used for both. Should the questionnaire consist of the same questions for both measures with possible some sub questions if more information is needed for open cases? The system described for the open cases and the address of concerns in a timely manner with staff seems to be an effective tool to keep staff informed of areas that both lead to any dissatisfaction with customers; as well as areas in which customers are highly satisfied. Good feedback for staff.*

DSU Response:

The DSU will continue to implement ways and strategies to improve customer service and address those areas of weaknesses that are identified in the consumer satisfaction survey. We will implement training for staff in this area to help address concerns and to help improve the overall quality of services. The DSU will also look at ways to improve the survey and accept the recommendation/suggestions regarding the rating scale, etc.

3. **Do you have any comments or recommendations for input in terms of potential service providers or discussions on the performance of service providers currently being used by OVR/OVRB?**

SRC Comments:

- *Please have MDRS do a yearly review because some of the providers don't work in a timely manner or what until they have enough work in an area before proceeding with work.*
- *No.*

- *None.*
- *I am very pleased with what is going on.*
- *The closed case satisfaction questionnaire ask.*
- *The closed case satisfaction questionnaire ask specifically about the services providers and indicates high satisfaction from consumers this quarter.*
- *No comment*
- *The Pre-ETS service provides were reviewed with the SRC members. This listing seemed comprehensive, statewide, and given students with a disabilities a variety for choices of service.*
- *Add a detailed list of acronyms on the agency website.*
- *In person sight visits from state and federal agencies.*

DSU Response:

The DSU will work on ways to improve our knowledge of the performance of service providers. This will help in providing more quality informed choice to our clients regarding providers of services as they make choices.

We will continue to determine ways to obtain more statewide providers for Pre-Employment Transition services to help ensure we are able to serve all students statewide that need Pre-Employment Transition Services.

Presentation of Information on Policy

4. Do you have any comments or recommendations concerning the:

A. Transition Potentially Eligible Program?

SRC Comments:

- *Not at this time*
- *No*
- *Not at this time*
- *No comments at this point. Service delivery systems appears to be working fine.*
- *The numbers of outcomes are impressive.*

B. Pre-ETS Transitions Services Update?

SRC Comments:

- *Good.*
- *Good to see that this is growing.*
- *The discussion regarding providers of Pre-ETS and the plan to publicize which providers provide which services and in which geographic area will be beneficial to staff, customers, and the public. The policy itself that was presented looks well written for staff use. The referencing of law and regulation helps one to understand why procedures are developed in the way that they are developed. Well done!*
- *No comments*
- *Excellent.*

DSU Response (A and B):

The DSU will work to continue to improve the quality and quantity of pre-employment transition services provided to potentially eligible and eligible students with disabilities.

C. Alcohol and Drug (A&D) Policy?

SRC Comments:

- *Good.*
- *Thank you so much for approval of the denial letter that residential treatment programs need for DMH Fee services.*
- *The reasons for a denial for a referral for secondary treatment were explained via a form letter that is available for a staff member to send to a referral source. I would suggest having a check box for use by staff that a consent to disclose information is valid and on file for the entity to be in receipt of the letter.*
- *No comments*
- *None.*

DSU Response:

The DSU updated this procedure in order to provide programs with a means to provide additional funding for clients needing secondary treatment. We will update our Consent to Disclose Information for the clients to sign.

D. Policy Procedures for Order of Selection?

SRC Comments:

- *Great! MDRS serves all.*
- *Nothing at this time.*
- *I hope you do not have to implement the order of Selection. The policy seems to be in line with the law. How will you notify the public if you implement Order of Selections?*
- *No comments or recommendations.*
- *More information and explanation.*
- *Informative.*

DSU Response:

The DSU implemented the changes to the Order of Selection based on federal mandates. The new changes will also allow VR to decide to serve clients who require specific equipment or services should the Order of Selection be implemented. At this time, all Priority Categories remain open.

E. Policy Procedures for Financial Needs Analysis?

SRC Comments:

- *It's great to know about computers not needing financial needs analysis because it is AT for the person's disability.*
- *No comments at this point.*

- *I believe that financial needs analyses do not fit within Vocational Rehabilitation. I believe the spirit of VR is to support job seekers with disabilities to achieve the highest employment outcomes possible. However, many employees with disabilities due to the nature of a disability being progressive or very significant may, in fact, need services more than once to maintain or progress in employment. Financial needs analyses can be an incentive for job seekers and later employees with disabilities to limit their income and earnings as not to earn themselves out of support services that they need. I do believe that all other comparable benefits should be utilized prior to VR funds being utilized. I like that some services are excluded from a financial needs analysis.*
- *No comments.*
- *None.*

DSU Response:

Changing the policy for financial participation will benefit the clients we serve, especially, when we have funds available to serve all clients. We do not want to create a hardship for clients that are in need of these services. Computers are more often a requirement for accommodations and accessibility. It is our goal to help ensure that the clients we serve are able to increase their skill gain and earn credentials. Often time, clients may have been eligible for services; however, based on the financial need, VR could not participate in the cost. Previous policy guidelines were developed that indicate that the FAFSA is the primary federal determination regarding a client's ability to pay and the amount of financial assistance they will receive.

F. Blind Enterprise Program Vendor Spotlight

SRC Comments:

- *This was very good.*
- *Enjoyed hearing about the success.*
- *Great process. Recognition of vendors and the services they provide is always needed.*
- *This a most excellent employment opportunity. I enjoyed hearing from an active and successful BEP Vendor.*
- *More information from client with complete vision lost.*
- *All recognitions regarding vendors and the clients they serve should always b4e front and center during meetings. Good job.*
- *Informative.*

DSU Response:

The DSU values the employment of all Mississippians who are blind or visually impaired. The DSU will endeavor to continue to bring awareness to blind vendors and commissary throughout the great state of Mississippi.

The DSU will also implement quarterly blind vendor spotlight to display the working abilities, skills and strength of the blind and visually impaired entrepreneurs of Mississippi. The DSU will continue to support the Business Enterprise Program to meet 21st century sales guidelines and newly renovated facilities throughout the state.

*Your perspective is extremely valuable,
and we greatly appreciate any and all feedback!
(A digital copy of this report can be found at www.mdrs.ms.gov)*

Please send direct comments or questions to:
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services
Attn: Betsy Simoneaux, VR Program Specialist-SRC Liaison
Post Office Box 1698
Jackson, Mississippi 39215-1698
1.800.443.1000
www.mdrs.ms.gov

